

Brussels,  
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*To all MEPs signatories of the letter of 23 November 2017 as regards the deterioration of the human rights situation in Cambodia*

*Dear Colleagues,*

I would like to thank you for your letter of 23 November whereby you express your increasing concern regarding the deterioration of the human rights situation in Cambodia.

Please rest assured you that I share your concerns and those mentioned in the European Parliament's Resolution of 9 June 2016. We continue to express these concerns to the Cambodian government.

As you know, a local EU Statement was issued on 30 May 2016, concerning the dangerous political escalation in Cambodia.

At the 9<sup>th</sup> EU-Cambodia Joint Committee, held in May 2016, the EU raised the issue of deteriorating relations between the two main Cambodian political parties and the narrowing space for public discussion, including for the opposition and the shrinking space for civil society. The EU urged the Government to create and maintain an environment where all civil society actors can operate freely and without fear. The EU specifically raised the cases of the arrest of civil society representatives and called for their release.

At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, a Joint Statement issued on 14 September 2016 on behalf of 39 countries, including the 28 EU Member States, expressed great concern about the escalation of political tensions in Cambodia and the appearance that legal action was being disproportionately pursued against critics of the government.

The EU has continued to raise concerns over the use of judicial processes for political purposes, in particular in relation to the detentions and trials of members of the opposition and the civil society. In particular, we are seriously concerned by the prolonged detention of four members of human rights NGO ADHOC and the Deputy Secretary-General of the National Election Committee (NEC) (known as the "ADHOC 5"). We will continue to ask that they be released from detention.

On 24 January 2017, a group of Political Counsellors from the EU Delegation, EU Member States, and like-minded Embassies in Phnom Penh visited the detained ADHOC 5. The EU Delegation to Cambodia has regularly attended trial hearings in various cases involving human rights defenders and members of the opposition.

The EU is supporting efforts towards a credible and democratic election process. In preparation for the upcoming commune elections in 2017, and the parliamentary election in 2018, the EU has worked closely with the Cambodian National Election Committee (NEC) in support of the creation

of a new biometric voter register. The EU has provided support worth € 10 million to the electoral reform, primarily through an improved voter registration process.

The EU is currently considering a possible deployment (if invited by the Cambodian Government) of an EU Election Expert Mission for the 2017 commune elections, as well as a full-scale EU Election Observation Mission for the national election in 2018.

The EU will continue to urge the Cambodian government to resume a genuine political dialogue with the opposition. We will continue using all diplomatic channels both in Phnom Penh and in Brussels to express the EU's concerns about current rising political tensions and actions targeting the opposition and civil society in Cambodia.

The EU will monitor closely the political situation in Cambodia ahead of the elections in 2017 and in 2018. We will continue to stress that the future stability of Cambodia requires genuine electoral competition in a fair and transparent system in which the outcome of elections is accepted by all parties.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini